

Serious Business

By Kathleen Piché, L.C.S.W., Public Affairs Director



Although the nurse wrote “Sarah,” on his birth certificate, he answered to “Serious.” From the age of two, Serious identified as male. At four, he noticed missing masculine body parts while walking around in his underwear.

Born and raised in Clarksdale, Mississippi, Serious was a loner from the beginning. He stayed away from most kids and hung out with his father, fishing, hunting and working on cars. His family considered him a “tomboy.”

Serious was in the fifth grade when he walked into the girl’s restroom at school and was attacked by a group of girls. Afterward, a girl involved in the assault walked past him and laughed. Another, not involved, smiled. Buried feelings of pain and frustration exploded and led him to attack the second girl. He reported the incident and both he and the girls were punished. That experience pushed him deeper into the shadows of isolation.

A year later, his father died of heart failure. If that wasn’t enough trauma to deal with in middle school, his mother died of Lupus when he started high school. Serious and his much older brother, who lived on-the-go, weren’t close. Feeling in the way, Serious started drinking and partying with others who identified as gay.

After high school, Serious learned to be a welder, then moved to Kansas in 2006 to reunite with his brother. In 2011, he relocated to Los Angeles with a girlfriend to attend film school, his dream. Initially, they lived in their car and in a hostile. Pooling resources allowed them to get an apartment and buy a two-month old puppy named Kurrency, a



lively Boxer Brindle. Serious realized how much the dog meant to him after he was forced to give her to a neighbor. Later, he met up with Kurrency again at a train station and bought her from a homeless woman. He thought everything would work with Kurrency back in his life.

Serious received a 3.92 GPA at film school, but couldn't acquire a degree because of outstanding debt. His dream evaporated. Times were tight and jobs hard to come by and he wound up homeless. The relationship ended with his girlfriend, but they still consider each other family.

While sleeping in a park, Kurrency stayed up all night protecting Serious. Serious credits the dog with saving him; keeping his hopes up and getting him through the toughest times.

Depressed, anxious and no longer able to function, Serious went to Rio Hondo Mental Health Center in 2013 to get mental health treatment. His therapist, Arturo Escamilla, Psychiatric Social Worker, helped Serious understand the impact of experiencing multiple traumas. Serious also realized that he'd been hiding a secret and depressed his entire life.

"I've been broken-- life has been bits and pieces—apart. I want to be whole. California has showed me a lot of pieces," Serious said.

The LA Gay and Lesbian Center helped him officially change his name. Maricela Estrada, Medical Case Worker II at Rio Hondo, helped with targeted case management, referrals to Bell Shelter and the eventual transition to permanent supportive housing. After many attempts, Maricela found housing for Serious and Kurrency at Mosaic Gardens, an MHSA funded project in Huntington Park. Serious is happy to be housed,

as is Kurrency, and stays active by writing with plans to get an MFA. He is currently writing a book entitled "A Woman's Pain."

When asked how he maintains recovery, Serious noted it's the simple things that make a difference. "I walked by an old woman being pushed in a wheelchair last night. I bowed my head to her and her whole face lit up. It was the biggest smile I've seen. I think she was tired of being pushed around. It made my day."

Now on the road to wellness and recovery, Serious stressed the importance of hope: "Hope means faith. I look at hope as strength, it's the only thing that keeps you alive, keeps you moving forward." He looks forward to integrating into a community where he can grow and make a difference in others' lives.